



REALITY TELEVISION

Human Life as the Least Common Denominator

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What is the purpose of television?

Reality television is a genre of television programming that documents unscripted situations and actual occurrences, and often features a previously unknown cast.

The genre often highlights personal drama and conflict to a much greater extent than other unscripted television such as documentary shows.



What are some of your faves?



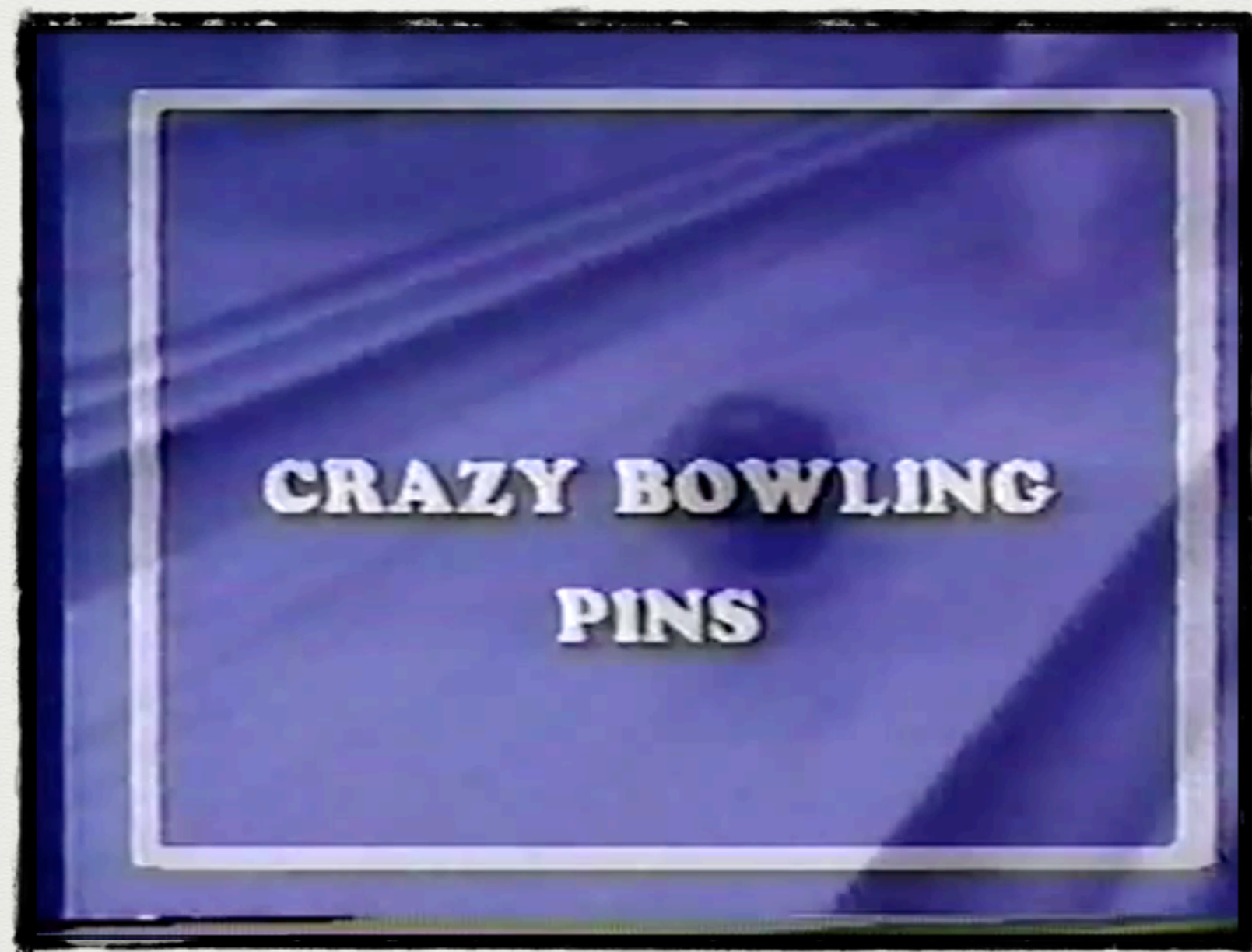
Some History 1940s-50s



Producer-host Allen Funt's Candid Camera, in which unsuspecting people were confronted with funny, unusual situations and filmed with a hidden camera, first aired in 1948, and is often seen as a prototype of reality TV programming.



- Queen for a Day (1945-64)
- Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour
- Truth or Consequences
- You Asked for It
- Nightwatch



Candid Camera

Some History 1960s-70s



The first reality show in the modern sense: *The American Sportsman* (1965-86). A typical episode featured one or more celebrities, and sometimes their family members, being accompanied by a camera crew on an outdoor adventure, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, scuba diving, rock climbing, wildlife photography, horseback riding, race car driving, with most of the resulting action and dialogue being unscripted, except for the narration.



- 1964 *Seven Up!*
- 1973 *An American Family*
- 1966 *Chelsea Girls*, Andy Warhol filmed various acquaintances with no direction given; "to blame for reality television"
- *The Dating Game*
- *The Gong Show*



The Gong Show

Some History 1980s-90s



Producer George Schlatter capitalized on the advent of videotape to create Real People, a surprise hit for NBC which ran from 1979 to 1984.

COPS: need for new programming during the 1988 Writers Guild of America strike; introduced the camcorder look and cinéma vérité feel of much of later reality television.

MTV's The Real World enabled by the advent of computer-based non-linear editing systems for video (such as produced by Avid Technology) in 1989.



- 1982-88 Thrill of a Lifetime
- 1985 Oceanquest Miss America Shawn Weatherly
- 1991 Number 28 (Dutch)
- 1997 Expedition Robinson (Sweden)
- various tabloid talk shows



COPS 1987 pilot

Some History 2000s



Reality television saw an explosion of global popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the successes of the Big Brother and Survivor/Expedition Robinson franchises.

Internationally, shows created in the late 1990s and 2000s have had massive global success. 9 reality-television franchises have had over 30 international adaptations each: the singing competition franchises and other competition franchises. Several "reality game shows" from the same period have had even greater success, with over 50 international adaptations each.

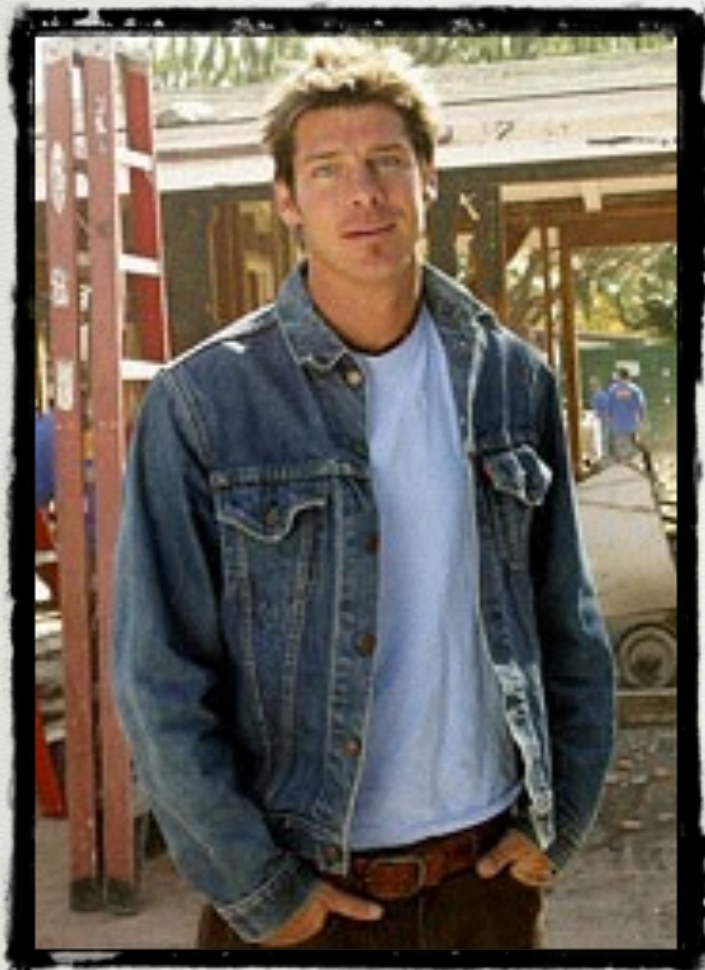


- 2001 Survivor
- 2004 American Idol
- Dancing with the Stars
- Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?
- America's Funniest Home Videos
- Cake Boss
- Duck Dynasty



Survivor, season 1

Current market



Murray and Ouellette (2009) propose 8 subgenres of reality television:

- gamedocs,
- dating programs,
- makeover programs,
- docusoaps,
- talent contests,
- court programs,
- reality sitcoms, and
- celebrity variations of other programs.

Others suggest that categorization is created by either narrative or performance reality.



Narrative reality television is based on "entertaining the viewers by an authentic or staged rendition of extraordinary, real, or close-to-reality events with non-prominent actors, whereas formats providing a stage for uncommon performances with a direct impact on the participants' lives fall into the category of performative reality TV."

Criticism & Analysis



The genre's title of "reality" is often criticized as being inaccurate because of claims that the genre frequently includes premeditated scripting; acting; urgings from behind-the-scenes crew to create specified situations of adversity and drama; misleading editing.

Various shows have been accused of using fakery in order to create more compelling television, such as

- premeditated storylines
- feeding participants lines of dialogue,
- focusing only on participants' most outlandish behavior,
- and altering events through editing and re-shoots.



Television shows that have been criticized for, or admitted to, deception include:

- The Real World
- Survivor
- Hell's Kitchen
- The Bachelor

Criticism & Analysis



As a substitute for scripted drama: VH1 executive vice president Michael Hirschorn wrote that the plots and subject matters on reality television are more authentic and more engaging than in scripted dramas, writing that scripted network television "remains dominated by variants on the police procedural... in which a stock group of characters (ethnically, sexually, and generationally diverse) grapples with endless versions of the same dilemma.



The episodes have all the ritual predictability of Japanese Noh theater," while reality TV is "the liveliest genre on the set right now. It has engaged hot-button cultural issues—class, sex, race—that respectable television... rarely touches."

Criticism & Analysis

The Bottom Line:

In virtually every line of the production budget, reality-based programming is cheaper than traditional programming.

Less equipment needed.

Cheaper equipment.

Smaller crew.

Fewer paid performers.

NO (union) WRITERS

The economic role of reality-based programming is to permit a network to cost-average down the price of programming across the entire primetime schedule.

A network can spend only about half of what it receives in ad revenue on the programming in which the ads run.





Reality shows are scripted?

Criticism & Analysis

The Cultural Effect:

As a spectacle of humiliation

Some have claimed that the success of reality television is due to its ability to provide schadenfreude, by satisfying the desire of viewers to see others humiliated.



Undeserved celebrity

Reality television can turn its participants into national celebrities, at least for a short period.

Participation of children

Psychologist Jamie Huysman, "It is exploitation [...] Nobody wants to watch normal behavior. Kids have to be co-conspirators to get the camera to stay on."





Cultural Effect of Reality TV

Let's put it to work...

- Work together in small groups
- Create a new reality TV show idea
- Pitch it to the "producers"

